

May 2015 extended essay reports

WORLD STUDIES

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 36

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The World Studies Extended Essay (WSEE) requires conformity to a particular structure. It must contain:

- An issue of global concern, elucidated in the introduction, over more pages than in other subjects if necessary
- A local manifestation of the global issue, considered in detail, using primary or secondary sources
- A clear indication of which IB academic subjects will form the basis of the interdisciplinary approach

Far too many essays were submitted which considered a particular, local issue without the establishment of a global dimension, a global issue with no local manifestation, or an investigation with no declared or overt relationship to IB academic subjects. There were also essays based on law and education, specifically noted in the Guide as not IB subjects and therefore not allowed.

These wrongly configured essays were a product of poor supervision: supervisors need to familiarize themselves with the WSEE model before allowing a candidate to embark on it. Supervisor training would be highly desirable.

The best essays showed emerging global consciousness, and used the essay as a means of expressing social concern thorough subject understanding. Researchers Reflection Spaces (RRSs) remained relatively rare, but were seen from the better candidates who were able to articulate their social concern. The best essays were inspiring to read, showing that the WSEE can capture the very best aspects of an IB Diploma education and exemplify the mission statement and Learner Profile.

The weakest essays were loosely related to IB academic subjects and seemed to have been clumsily retro-fitted to the WSEE because they were insufficiently appropriate to a single subject. The WSEE seems always to attract some waifs and strays, often submitted late and with little supervision. These essays often contain excessive amounts of narrative or are opinion pieces without proper referencing.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

A good research question (RQ) forms the foundation for a successful essay and in most cases candidates have based their work on a clearly formulated, focused question. Problems also arise when the RQ is presented in different parts of the essay (title, abstract, and introduction) using slightly different wording. This should be avoided.

Criterion B: introduction

In order to demonstrate the biological context and significance of the research question the candidate needs to present a summary of literature and other sources that have been accessed.

Criterion C: investigation

There must be clear evidence that the investigation has been planned by the candidate. Candidates can achieve this by explaining how information obtained from the sources helped to guide their decisions about which approach to follow.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Understanding can be demonstrated by providing explanations and justifications for decisions about the research direction (why was something included, why was something else omitted) and methods.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

In order to achieve a fluent and coherent argument, candidates need to be explicit about their reasoning. A clear line of argument can be established and sustained when there is regular reference to the research question throughout the essay.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

While candidates should be encouraged to use statistical analysis where appropriate they must also be selective about the techniques used and should be encouraged to explain and justify their approach.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject:

There are two aspects to this criterion: the use of clear and precise language on the one hand and the use of terminology appropriate to the topic on the other. Candidates need to adopt

and sustain a clear and precise formal style and show an understanding of and fluency with the main technical terms associated with the topic.

Criterion H: conclusion

In an effective conclusion the candidate restates the research question and outlines the extent to which it has been answered, dealing also with issues that have not been resolved. Candidates should express the conclusions concisely and not overstate the findings.

Criterion I: formal presentation

The extended essay is a research report with its own formal requirements, different to those that apply to Internal Assessment. Candidates should be discouraged from using the IA criteria designations as chapter headings. There is a trend amongst candidates who take this approach to present a critical evaluation as the last section of the essay – after the conclusion. This does not make sense in terms of the scientific argument, conclusions can only be reached in the light of the identified weaknesses of the study and as such, the conclusion should be the last section of the essay.

Candidates should be aware that text presented in tables (excluding column and row headings) counts towards the total word count.

All of the sources accessed must be included in the bibliography and for the majority of these there should be some corresponding in-text reference.

Candidates also need to be selective about whether to include in an appendix as the essay should make sense without any reference to the appendix.

Large tables of raw data can also be presented in an appendix but should be referred to in the text of the essay.

Criterion J: abstract

The most common problem is the failure to deal adequately with the scope of the essay. It is expected that the abstract will outline the methods that were used as well as the type and quantity of data collected.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Supervisors should be aware that the comments they write on the extended essay cover sheet (on the circumstances surrounding the research and level of personal involvement of the candidate) can be of considerable assistance to the examiners in assessing criterion K.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

The most successful essays are those that are based on a small number of variables that are clearly defined and easily manipulated and measured. Successful essays often use basic equipment of the type that can be normally found in a school, and can be out in the school laboratory or in the local environment. In addition successful essays have a clear academic, biological context and the relevance of published data and or information is explored.

Poor essays are produced when there has not been early intervention by a supervisor. Candidates can be encouraged to engage more fully with the writing process and to communicate more with the supervisor by agreeing on a detailed timetable with internal deadlines for various stages of the research process. This will also help to avoid time being wasted on unsuitable or overambitious investigations.

The number of supervisors who make no comment on the cover sheet has decreased and this is a pleasing development. However other points from previous reports remain valid. Candidates continue to be in need of guidance on the following:

- establishing, refining and using the research question (this is a requirement)
- providing a clear academic context for the research
- sustaining an effective argument
- displaying a command of the language of the topic
- bibliographic entries and in-text references
- structuring the essay (headings and sub headings)
- incorporating and integrating diagrams and illustrations
- selecting material for inclusion in an appendix
- writing an abstract
- sample size
- statistical approaches
- avoiding bias
- dealing appropriately with ethical issues (related to animal and human subjects)